

HOOSIER WOMEN AT WORK

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Dr. Edna Henry and the Emergence of Social Work

KATHERINE BADERTSCHER*

Dr. Edna Gertrude Henry (1874-1942) served as the founding director of the Social Service Department at Indiana University – today the IU School of Social Work. Henry had helped found the Associated Charities (COS) in Anderson, Indiana, served on the Mothers' Aid Society executive committee, and as an Indianapolis Charity Organization Society (COS) friendly visitor and central council member.

Social work pioneer Mary Richmond was undoubtedly the most influential social work practitioner, leader, and teacher of her time. We know far less, however, about Edna Henry and her influence on Indiana social work. Dr. Henry's legacy has been overshadowed by that of Dr. Charles P. Emerson, the dean of the Indiana School of Medicine. While Emerson hired Henry, she overcame numerous obstacles while creating the new practice. She earned her master's and doctorate degrees while building, staffing, and operating her department. In her capacity as Social Service Department director, Edna Henry remained embedded in the inner workings of Indianapolis charities and the COS in particular. As a teacher and practitioner, Henry's conclusion that social work relied more on innate talents than education placed her at odds with Mary Richmond's insistence on case-work skills, sound reasoning, clear thinking, and advanced standards.

This paper contributes to Hoosier Women at Work by exploring the contributions of Dr. Edna Henry in the context of the emerging field of professional social work.

* Katherine Badertscher is Director of Master's Degree Programs and Lecturer at the Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy.